What’s your resonance quotient?

Resonant leaders are those who break the mould and chart a new path for themselves, cemented by the strength of connections and empathy.

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Leaders come in all shapes, sizes, forms, and colours. Some are good and some are bad. By definition, few are exceptional. Great leaders are in high demand as winning businesses understand that it is not enough to have only an outstanding CEO atop your organisation. Any person with any kind of managerial responsibility should be an effective leader, and for leaders to be truly effective today, they need to be able to connect with and resonate with the people they are leading. Managing through fear and intimidation may still work in some corners of some companies, but those settings and circumstances are becoming fewer and farther between.

While the Declaration of Independence proclaims that “all men are created equal,” a self-evident truth in business and in life is that different people have different strengths and different weaknesses. Anyone who has ever been managed can affirm that successful leaders are materially different in their make-up compared to their less effectual brethren. And while no two leaders will ever be exactly the same, good leaders tend to share similar characteristics.

I have identified seven traits that are core to the composition of resonant leaders that allow them to connect with and inspire the people they lead and that, in turn, position organisations to create value and flourish.

**Self-awareness**
Before you can effectively lead others, you must be in tune and in touch with yourself. I am a strong believer that the first step in the journey towards becoming a leader entails gaining deep self-awareness. You must learn your own strengths and weaknesses, identify what it is that makes you unique and special, and engage in the process of making your superpower central to what you do and what you focus on. Unfortunately, this critical initial piece of the puzzle is regularly skipped by many people who become leaders—and by most people in general. Too few take the time needed to really understand what makes them meaningfully differentiated, let alone what makes them happy and fulfilled. Resonant leaders not only understand the people they lead, they understand themselves.

**Self-confidence**
It is not enough to be aware of who you are; it is vital to be comfortable with who you are. Leaders who possess genuine self-confidence are comfortable in their own skin and do not
feel the need to try to be someone they are not. Effective leaders are able to command the trust of those in their employ, but if you do not truly trust yourself, you will struggle with the vital task of engendering trust among others. As hard as many leaders try, confidence cannot be faked. False and manufactured confidence is easy to see through—you will not resonate externally if you do not resonate internally. Ultimately, there is nothing more resonant than authenticity—once you understand yourself and are confident in and comfortable with who you are as a person and as a leader, you can be yourself.

**Love of people**
As important as it is to be in touch with yourself, leadership is ultimately about bringing out the best in other people. To do so, you have to actually like other people. It may sound obvious, but consider the number of ‘leaders’ you have encountered in your lifetime who do not really like people, let alone possess a burning passion for human beings and human interaction. Too many people who gain leadership and managerial responsibility stumble into positions of authority or assume positions of leadership for the wrong reasons. Perhaps, they excelled in their job—a job that did not involve leadership—and were promoted. Perhaps they attained their power through inheritance, nepotism, or deception. In comparing good leaders and bad leaders, a key discovery is that resonant leaders fundamentally understand that leadership is about you, not about me. If you do not deeply love people, you will never be a resonant leader.

**Empathy**
Resonant leaders connect with other people in a natural, genuine, and visceral way. They easily and authentically relate and can intuitively feel your pain. They possess both a high level of emotional intelligence and a sensitivity toward others that compel them to act out of concern, care, and love rather than manipulation and calculation. In other words, they are empathetic. To get the most out of the people you manage, you must get to know them at a deeper level. Understand who they are, what drives them, what matters to them and why. And lead them in the way they need to be led.

**Flexibility**
There is no singular path to success and there is rarely only one correct approach toward solving a problem. We are all wired differently, we think differently, and we act differently. Resonant leaders possess flexibility in their thinking, in their management of others, and in their approach toward life. If your goal is to create the most value for your organisation, then you will need each person you lead to perform to the best of his or her abilities. A one-size-fits-all approach to leadership will only lead to the underutilisation of potentially key contributors. Leaders can, should, and will have their own unique styles and voices, but if and when your message is not resonating, it is imperative to have the humility and the flexibility to re-examine it and change course as needed.
Vision
To drive your team and your organisation to success, you must lay out a vision for your people to follow. Great leaders do not necessarily need to be the most visionary people within a company, and in fact, often are not. However, leaders must adopt and translate the grand vision—whether it is their own or it is a byproduct of someone else’s creativity and foresight—and inspire others to get there. Resonant leaders have a feel for and understand where to take their team directionally; what short-term and long-term goals to set and focus on; and how to effectively prioritise. Resonant leaders understand that in order to create value and lead the organisations to success, you must first clearly define what you are going after and what success looks like and means.

Morality
Underlying truly resonant leadership is one’s commitment to choosing right over wrong, an adherence to a set of principles that defines your moral code of conduct. In defining ethical leadership, the outcome is often far less important than the process one takes to get there. You do not need to be an ethicist to recognise that two people with the purest of intentions can come out on opposite sides of a given issue or decision. Moral leaders conduct themselves in personal and professional alignment with a belief system that they deem to be in the best interest of the people they are serving and the greater good. When you feel confident that your leader has both your best interests and the collective best interest at heart, you will more readily, wilfully and, perhaps, eagerly follow. You might not know what the right answer is—and often there is not one—but you will know that whatever path you go down, it will be for the right reasons.